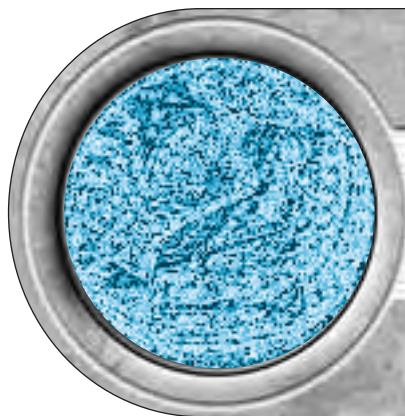




TELLING YOUR STORY

Amazing Grace

January 8, 2011

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Isaiah 43:10-12 (NIV) • “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘that I am God.’”

Acts 26:17, 18 (NIV) • “I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 (NIV) • “In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?’ tell him: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders—great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we

might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.’”

Psalms 66:16 (NIV) • “Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.”

John 21:24, 25 (NIV) • “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

(See additional passages in student material.)

B. WHAT'S TO BE SAID ABOUT “TELLING YOUR STORY”

What would you say about your faith and why you are a Christian? This lesson will explore the components of a person's personal story and the impact it has on others for communicating the gospel. This lesson will also examine the conversion stories of people of faith in the Bible and on into our contemporary experience. The outcome of this lesson will be a thoughtful consideration of the stories that can shape and encourage teens. Some of the major questions students will explore are: What personal stories and experiences have made me who I am? When did I really talk to God about where I was

going to spend eternity, or whether or not I was going to accept His sacrifice? When, if ever, did it become very real to me? What is different about my life/mind set since then?

C. WHERE WE'RE GOING WITH "TELLING YOUR STORY"

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Examine the power of stories.
2. Discover how our personal stories are shaped and communicated.
3. Demonstrate the makeup of a personal testimony based upon biblical stories.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) paper, pens or pencils; (Activity B) three chairs.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons, pens or pencils, handout on p. 25, chalkboard or flipchart.

Applying • Paper, pens or pencils.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE'VE BEEN BEFORE

Allow 10 minutes as students are arriving to:

1. Ask them which verse they chose to learn from Wednesday's portion of their lesson. Give them opportunity to say their verses from memory.
2. Give the students opportunity to "quote" themselves, using what they wrote in the Monday portion of their lesson. Be sure to debrief them about any quotations that might not reflect the Christian life accurately. However, quotations of this nature do not occur in every lesson.
3. Review responses that they and others made to the scenario that was posed on Sunday. Discuss the variety of responses,

ending with thoughts from last week's What's to Be Said About . . . in the teacher lesson.

If you have a very large group, have adults available to process this section with smaller groups of students.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

- >> Song service
- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for *Adventist Mission for Youth and Adult* at www.realtimefaith.net)
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word. At some point you should distribute or call their attention to their student lesson for this week.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • The purpose of this exercise is to give students an opportunity to develop their storytelling ability using an improvisational exercise. The students are supposed to create a story on a particular theme (love, forgiveness, change, grace, honesty, anger, etc.). They need paper and something to write with.

Get set • Say: Today we are going to talk about the power of stories. Before we get into our topic we can practice improvised storytelling. I'm going to give you a theme and as a class you can come up with some of the parts of the story. The theme for today is "forgiveness." (Choose any theme you think the kids could speak thoughtfully about—refer to the

ones above if need be.) **I want you to write a story about forgiveness, but first we need to think of an appliance that you might find in the kitchen.** (Let a student make the suggestion, for example a microwave.) **The next thing we need to decide is a setting where large amounts of people gather** (examples: ball game, shopping mall), **and finally we need a mode of transportation** (examples: car, bike, plane, train). **OK. We're ready!**

Go • Say: I want you to write a story about forgiveness. Please include the following items in your story: (a microwave oven, a baseball game, and a bicycle). You have five minutes. **Go!**

When the time is up, have the students read their stories to each other and then share them with the class. Then **say:** This exercise was to demonstrate that all of us can tell stories. Not only did you tell a story, but you told a story using ordinary things. In many ways, a good story is a break in the routine or a bump along the road of an ordinary day. But stories are powerful.

Debriefing • Ask: Why do you respond so well to sermons with lots of stories? What sermons do you remember well because of a story? Why do you think stories so powerfully lodge themselves into our memory while lists and facts leave our brains more easily?

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Another improvisational storytelling game is called The Expert. The object is to get three people (sitting up front in chairs) to respond to interview questions as though the three were one person—an expert. Starting from left to right each member of The Expert is allowed to say only one word at a time. Their goal is to not only answer the questions but to do so in the form of a story, if at all possible. The teacher will be the interviewer. He or she should choose three students ahead of time who would be willing to model this exercise and

possibly practice it together before going before the rest of the class.

Get set • Set up the front of the class like a talk show. Make sure The Expert knows what their job is: To speak as one person and to try to effectively tell a complete, coherent story as one.

Go • The three chairs for The Expert should be close together to give the impression of one person. The game should be introduced as follows:

“Welcome to The Expert! A show where we bring in an expert and interview them for helpful information to improve our lives. Our expert today is a leading specialist in getting 3-year-old children to break their thumb-sucking habit. (Choose your own topic.)

Say: OK, let's begin. We have a few questions for you today:

Ask: What are some of your hobbies? What do you like most about those/those particular activity?

What did you do before you became the leading specialist of (breaking the habit of thumb-sucking)?

Tell us your favorite experience of (getting a child to break the habit).

(Feel free to arrange the interview anyway you want; just remember the object is to get them to tell a story.)

Debriefing • Ask: What do you think are some important aspects of any story? (relevant, exciting, realistic, believable) **What were you thinking about when the expert was talking?** (I was wondering what they would say next. We were thinking what we would say.) **In what way does a story connect us as people? How can it separate us?**

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

The story is told of Jacob Koshy, a young man who grew up in Singapore. He focused his life on becoming successful by attaining money

and possessions. His drive for things led him to a life of crime, and he gambled, sold drugs, and ultimately became a ringleader of an international smuggling network. His successful career in crime finally ended, and he was led off to prison. Jacob was addicted to smoking, and although cigarettes weren't allowed in prison, he found a way to smuggle in tobacco. In order to make his cigarettes, he used the pages of a Gideon Bible.

One night, he fell asleep while smoking his Scripture-cased cigarette and awoke to find the tobacco had burned up, but a scrap of charred paper remained. He unrolled what was left of the paper and read: "Saul, Saul, Why do you persecute me?" Desperately curious about the nature of such a story, Jacob requested another Bible and read the whole story of Saul's encounter with God. If God could restore a man like Saul, maybe He could redeem Jacob as well. Jacob prayed to God in his cell and began to share his story with other prisoners. After serving his sentence and being released from prison, Jacob married a Christian woman and continued to share his story about how he found God while smoking the Bible.

Debriefing • Ask: When you hear a story like this, what is your reaction? How do the stories of others help us in our relationship with God?

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

The story of the kingdom of God is really a series of little stories of people who lived as agents in God's kingdom. The stories can be ordinary or extraordinary. All the moments have a special place in God's memory, but not all of the story can be told. Even John declares this when he says, "This is the disciple who testifies to

these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (**John 21:24, 25, NIV**). But what is told is for the purpose of bringing people closer to God. This is the purpose and the power of the personal testimony—the story about what God has done for you. No other sermon, no matter how clever, punchy, power-packed, or animated, will ever cause more change than someone's personal story.

If you look at the stories that change people, you'll notice that they usually have three parts: (1) my life before personally encountering God, (2) an encounter with God in which I became aware of my need of Him and received His grace for me, and (3) the difference it has made in my life since I gave my heart to God. While some struggle to identify a "single moment" in which they encountered God, one can usually think of some specific, significant events when they felt God's presence. Those events may not be anything like a violent storm on the sea, but the encounter with God is as real as any dramatic moment captured in a well-known story. The important thing about these types of stories is that all of them tend to show a changed life.

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath's portion of the lesson.

Ask: In what way does the story of Newton's life bring new meaning to this popular song that is a timeless testimony of God's grace? Parts of his story are very ordinary and parts are quite dramatic. The power of the story is not in the miracle of the storm as much as it is in the miracle of how his life changed afterward. How do you explain the way God turned his life around? Do you know someone who has had a similar experience? What kinds of events does God use to wake us up?

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following scenario:

Two stories are told in church one day. One story comes from someone whose hell-bound life would make most criminals blush. The change is dramatic and the stories are somewhat scary, yet exciting. Another story is told by someone who grew up in the church and can't really remember any dramatic moments in their life. Instead, they simply share stories about events like summer camp or a role model who displayed God's love to them.

The exciting story and the ordinary one both indicate to those hearing them how much the teller loved God, and they both cause those hearing them to want to commit themselves to serving God for the rest of their lives.

Ask: What are the benefits and the drawbacks of each type of story? How is each story a powerful tool for God's kingdom?

Present the following ideas in your own words:

Consider how Paul, whose conversion story is pretty dramatic, honors and elevates Timothy's story, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14, 15, NIV). Paul admires Timothy for his faithful life. Paul entrusted Timothy, a young person who grew up in the church, with the ministry of the church and considers him a great leader. Coming from a guy who was struck down on the Damascus Road, this is a great testimony to the value of each story in the kingdom.

Have students get into groups of four or five and work on the exercise in the handout from page 25. The handout contains five biblical stories of people who experienced different kinds of encounters with God. Each person in each group should be assigned a story.

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Divide the students into groups of two to four and invite them to share a story from their life in which they experienced:

God answering a prayer.

God opening a door for them (opportunity).

God providing for their needs.

God protecting them in a miraculous way.

God speaking to them in a still small voice.

In addition to telling their story, invite the students to make a connection between their story and a biblical story by asking, "What story in the Bible is like your story?" For some who have had God provide basic necessities in a time of need, they might choose the feeding of the five thousand or Elijah by the brook.

Using the How Does it Work? section in the student lesson, invite the students to fill out the worksheet that calls for five stories from their lives that were important in making them who they are today. Students can share their list with others if they want to. Some might have traumatic scenarios that would be uncomfortable to talk about so it might be better to keep this open-ended. For those who might want to share, allow them to do so and ask them why they chose those stories. Have a student read the following passages from the Bible or the student lesson: **John 20:30, 31** and **John 21:24, 25**.

Debriefing • Ask: Imagine and brainstorm the kind of stories John had to leave out. Why do you think he chose the ones he did? Why do you think it's good to connect our story to other stories in Scripture? Everyone has hundreds of stories to tell; what criteria did you use to choose the stories that were most meaningful to your life?

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. When you look back at the past, in what

areas of your life have you seen God at work the most?

2. Do you know someone who has had a dramatic conversion story?
3. Do you know someone who has had a quiet, still small voice experience?
4. How do you think telling your story or testimony to someone else strengthens your own faith?
5. If you could tell your story to someone this week, who do you think might be encouraged the most by hearing your testimony?
6. Consider writing a note this week to someone whose story has inspired you, letting them know how their testimony has helped you.

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

One of the most meaningful moments you can ever have in your walk with God is when you reflect on what has brought you to a relationship with Him. Maybe your story has a miracle moment or maybe it's quiet, but very real to you. Either way, your story is 10 times more meaningful when you share it with someone else. But first, take some time to think about your journey. Then pray that God will help you have the courage to share your story with someone who might need encouragement.

FOR LESSON TWO:

THIS HANDOUT IS FOR THE “CONNECTING TO LIFE” ACTIVITY.

DIRECTIONS: After dividing into groups of four or five, assign each person one of the following stories to read and respond to. Then have everyone in the group share their insights.

1. Saul/Paul (read Acts 26)
2. Demon-possessed man (read Mark 5)
3. The blind man who was healed by Jesus (read John 9)
4. The Samaritan woman at the well (read John 4)
5. The leper who couldn't be silent (read Mark 1:40-45)

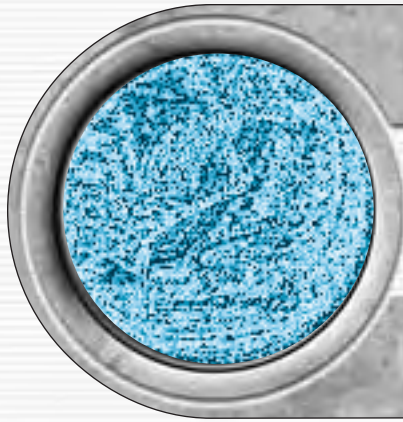
Now, take a few minutes to write down your thoughts on the following:

1. Describe their life before they encountered Christ.

2. Identify the moment when they experienced an encounter with God.

3. Point out how their life was changed by the experience.

Share your insights and the answers to the above statements with the rest of your group. How do the stories differ? What components are similar? Which person do you identify with most? Why?



STUDENT LESSON

TELLING YOUR STORY Amazing Grace

January 8, 2011

>>KEY TEXT: Choose one of the texts from Wednesday's portion of the lesson. Write it here and memorize it this week.



AMAZING GRACE

(What connection do you think the following illustration has with the Bible texts on the other page?)

If anyone's story has made a difference in the way others come to know God, it is John Newton's. Born in the early 1700s, John was the son of a commander of a merchant ship; he grew up sailing the Mediterranean Sea with his father. After his father retired, John continued to sail on voyages as a midshipman until being demoted to seaman for desertion.

His life seemingly took a turn for the worse when John became the servant of a slave trader, working on a slave ship. However, John worked his way up the ranks until he became a commander of his own slave ship. John had completely given up on any religious notions he might have gleaned as a child from his mother. He grew to be a hateful, cynical man lacking in moral goodness.

This was his story, until it changed as fast as the weather on the open seas. John Newton was returning on a homeward voyage when he

ran straight into a violent storm, causing him to squeeze out a cry for help: "Lord, have mercy on us!" Later that night, after the storm had subsided, John quietly reflected about his encounter with God. The seeds of grace that were planted in his heart that night, May 10, 1748, grew, and he turned his life completely around. As a result of his experience he penned the words to the hymn "Amazing Grace." This is the original version of the song. Read it and see if you can't sneak a peek into this man's story in a new way.

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That sav'd a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev'd;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believ'd!
Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.
The Lord has promis'd good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.
Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease;
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.
The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who call'd me here below,
Will be forever mine.



Sunday

HERE'S WHAT I THINK

Fifteen-year-old Cynthia called the other day with a heavy heart. She doesn't feel as if she has a close walk with God because she can't remember a specific moment when she gave her life to Him. "I know I have asked God into my heart so many times, but that's the way it has been all my life. I feel as if my commitment to God would be better if I had never been raised as a Christian."

How do you know when you've really given your life to God? Cynthia is listening right now and waiting for encouragement, insight, or good advice.

Log on to www.guidemagazine.org/rtf to share your experience as well. Post your responses. Be up-front and honest. Say what you think.



Monday

WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO SAY?

Different people, different opinions. Some of the quotations below represent the views of true kingdom citizens; others may not. Can you tell the difference? How do these statements compare with what God is saying in His Word? After reviewing the texts in the God Says . . . portion of the lesson, write a statement that captures your belief. Be prepared to quote yourself at Sabbath School.

>>"In the midst of a generation screaming for answers, Christians are stuttering."—Howard Hendricks, current U.S. author, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.

>>"T. H. Huxley, a well-known agnostic, was with a group of men at a weekend house party. On Sunday morning, while most of them were preparing to go to church, he approached a man known for his Christian character and said, 'Suppose you stay at home and tell me why you are a Christian.' The man, knowing he couldn't match wits with Huxley, hesitated. But the ag-

nostic said gently, 'I don't want to argue with you. I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you.' The man did, and when he finished, there were tears in Huxley's eyes as he said, 'I would give my right hand if only I could believe that!'"—Our Daily Bread, January 24, 1993.

>>"A 1980 Gallup poll indicated that out of all evangelical American believers, only two percent had introduced another person to Christ."—J. K.

Johnston, *Why Christians Sin* (Discovery House, 1992), p. 140.

>>Definition of a witness:

"A witness is someone who by explanation and demonstration gives audible and visible evidence of what he has seen and heard without being deterred by the consequences of his action."

—S. Briscoe, current U.S. Baptist pastor.

>>"God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them."—George Whitefield, 18th-century English Methodist revivalist.

Write your own quotation.

WHAT I SAY IS . . .



Tuesday

SO WHAT?

When the children of Israel were on the edge of the Promised Land, they received instruction from God on what to say when their teens went crazy and demanded to know the meaning of all this church stuff. You can read it in **Deuteronomy 6:20-22 (NIV)**, "In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?' tell him: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders—great

and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household.”

God was saying, “When the kids cry out for answers, give them your story. Give them the blow-by-blow story of the plagues. Tell them about walking through the Red Sea. Try and recount the way manna fell from the sky. Tell them your story.” God’s great answer to the questions teens ask is not a sermon or a lecture. It’s not a 10-step list for making good choices or some logical debate on truth. The answer is not a quiz or a test—but a story. Your story. Stories about what God has done for you are the most effective witnessing tool available.



Wednesday GOD SAYS . . .

>>Isaiah 43:10-12 (NIV)

“‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘that I am God.’”

>>John 20:30, 31 (NIV)

“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

>>Psalms 66:16 (NIV)

“Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.”

>>John 21:24, 25 (NIV)

“This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

>>Mark 5:18-20 (NIV)

“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”

>>1 John 1:1-4 (NIV)

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”



Thursday WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

Have you ever noticed how athletes can be superstitious? They commence with a variety of senseless rituals so as not to jinx their imminent good fortune. In the same way, some people who have mountaintop experiences or a spiritual awakening don’t want to do anything to ruin the moment. They cling to a feeling and hope it never goes away. The demon-possessed man, after being healed by Christ, jumped in the boat and was clinging to Jesus, begging the Lord to let him stay by His side. Clearly, he was afraid that as soon as Jesus left, the demons would return and he would go back to the horrible life he had been rescued from. But the words of Christ are as sure today as they were for that man long ago: “‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how

much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed" (**Mark 5:19, 20, NIV**).

Can you imagine how people would be changed by such a testimony? One of the ways we experience consistency and growth in our lives is by simply telling our story. Not only does it then live in another person's mind, but it awakens new life in our own. Try it. Tell someone about what God has done for you. Describe how you feel about God's mercy and grace. Write it in a letter if you have no one to tell, but do something. Your walk with God will change when you share what the Savior has done for you. No doubt.



Friday

HOW DOES IT WORK?

If you had to choose five events of your life that have made a big difference in who you are today, what five stories would you tell?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The following is a simple outline to help you construct your own personal testimony, your

story about you and God. It's important to be as specific as possible with your stories.

My Life Before I Encountered God

My Encounter With God

My Life as a Result of an Encounter With God



